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*Remarkable Creatures: Epic Adventures in the Search for the
Origin of Species* by Sean B. Carroll, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
2009

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Recommended Readings



REMARKABLE CREATURES: Epic Adventures in the Search for the Origin of Species

by Sean B. Carroll, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2009

Reviewed by Michael Zimmerman

In this light but thoroughly engaging book, Carroll provides vignettes of some of the people who have made the most significant discoveries in the field of evolutionary biology. Given the nature of his subjects, it is unclear whether the remarkable creatures are the new species discovered by the naturalists he discusses or those naturalists themselves.

He starts with some of the great explorers, Alexander von Humboldt, Charles Darwin, Alfred Russel Wallace and Henry Bates, and discusses their amazing experiences as well as their remarkable insights. With a theory of evolution taking shape in the latter part of the 19th century, Carroll turns his attention to paleontologists who devoted their careers searching for fossil evidence to support that theory. He writes of Eugene Dubois's hunt for what become known as Java Man, Charles Walcott's discovery of the Burgess Shale and the evidence it provided for the Cambrian explosion, and Neil Shubin's adventures in arctic Canada that led to the discovery of Tiktaalik, the intermediary "between water- and land-dwelling vertebrates," among others.

Carroll closes by telling stories associated with our growing understanding of the evolutionary role our own species fills in nature. He describes the life-long search for evidence of human ancestors undertaken by Louis and Mary Leakey, and then looks to the advances made by such laboratory scientists as Linus Pauling and Allan Wilson which permitted us to conclude that Neanderthals were cousins rather than direct ancestors. While there's really not much new in any of the stories Carroll presents, they do come together to make an arresting tapestry of evolutionary advancement.

- Michael Zimmerman is Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and professor of biology at Butler University.